

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

The psalm has been a favorite of God's people through the ages and with due reason: it expresses as simply and clearly as any the role of God as our protector and provider in life. The charm of the psalm rests on two figures of speech: The Lord is compared to a shepherd and the believer to His sheep (verses 1-4); then the Lord is likened to a host with the believer as the guest (verses 5-6). The image of the Lord as shepherd is a frequent one in both the Old Testament (Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:10), and the New Testament (John 10:11-16; Heb. 13:20; see the note on Jer. 23:3). Believers are never pictured in Scripture as mighty lions, independent and self-sufficient; rather, they are sheep who are dependent on their Shepherd for His provision and protection. The believer is more than a dependent sheep, however; he is also like an honored guest, since the Lord prepares a "table" for him (verse 5). Connected with this honored position is abundant provision, vindication before one's enemies, and eternal celebration of God's goodness.

Psalm 23:1 "The LORD [is] my shepherd; I shall not want."

"The Lord is my shepherd": (Compare Gen. 48:15; 49:24; Deut. 32:6; Psalms 28:9; 74:1; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 23:3; Ezek. chapter 34; Hos. 4:16; Micah 5:4; 7:14; Zech. 9:16), on the image of the Lord as a Shepherd. This imagery was used commonly in kingly applications and is frequently applied to Jesus in the New Testament (e.g., John chapter 10; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4).

The Hebrew word for "shepherd" is *rohi*. One of God's names is Jehovah-Rohi, meaning "The Lord my shepherd" David recognized that God cared for him the same way David had cared for his sheep (Gen. 48:15; John 10:7-18; 1 Pet. 2:25).

"I shall not want" literally means "I shall not lack". God's loving, protective care is perfect; His sheep need nothing else (34:9-10; Phil 4:19; Rev. 7:16-17).

David could easily relate to the Lord as Shepherd. David had been a shepherd himself. We know that the sheep of a good shepherd do not want for anything. The shepherd takes care of their needs. We also know that on judgement day the great Shepherd (Jesus Christ), will separate His sheep from the goats. We will see in Jesus' own words that He is the good Shepherd.

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

What is a shepherd? He is a keeper of the sheep. The needs of the sheep are the first concern of a good shepherd. The sheep shall not want, because the shepherd takes care of all their needs. Just as the shepherd, such as David was, thinks first of the good and welfare of the sheep. The Lord Jesus (our Great Shepherd), thought first of the welfare of His sheep (all believers). David fought off the wild beasts (literally endangering his own life for his sheep). Jesus lay down His life for His sheep.

Verses 2-3: Four characterizing activities of the Lord as Shepherd (i.e., emphasizing His grace and guidance), are followed by the ultimate basis for His goodness, i.e., "His name's sake" (compare Psalms 25:11; 31:3; 106:8; Isa. 43:25; 48:9; Ezek. 36:22-32).

Psalm 23:2 "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

This is a picture of complete peacefulness and rest. God's people, like sheep, do not have enough sense to go to the "pastures" for food or find the "still waters". So the Good Shepherd leads His beloved ones to a place of sustenance and rest (65:11-13; Ezek. 34:14; Rev. 7:17).

The good Shepherd knows the needs of His sheep, and He leads them to the food (green pastures), where they can find this food. For the believer, this food is the Word of God. We are told to eat of this Word.

Luke 4:4 "And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."

Jeremiah 15:16 "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts."

We know then, we are to eat the Word. Now let's look at this still water. Let us look at this water in the next few Scriptures. Notice one statement above about the water, before we begin. This water is not forced upon the sheep. They are led to the water, and they may or not partake of that water. It is available, but they must drink.

John 4:14 "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

This water of the Good Shepherd seems to have life everlasting in it. John 7:38 "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

This living water then is the Spirit. It is available to all believers. Notice now, that the Great Shepherd has provided the Word to eat and the Spirit to drink in. It is the sheep's option whether to take it or not.

1 Corinthians 12:13 "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

Psalm 23:3 "He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

Humanity needs “soul” restoration because of spiritual carelessness, difficult circumstances, secret sin, and the world’s influence. The Creator of heaven and earth desires intimate involvement with His people, wanting to lead them, not just point the way.

Man could not restore his own soul. All who ever lived, besides Jesus, have sinned and are guilty of sin unto death. Jesus became our substitute for our sin on the cross and gave us His righteousness. Then Jesus Christ restored my soul. He not only leads us into righteousness, but He actually clothed you and me with His righteousness. Our righteousness is in Christ. Jesus is the one who keeps us on the right path. We are set free from sin by taking on the name of Jesus Christ (Christian).

Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Jesus lay down His life for His sheep. Restoring my soul makes me a new creature in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Jesus leads us in paths of righteousness, but we must follow. A good sheep knows the voice of the Shepherd and follows Him.

1 John 1:7 "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Psalm 23:4 "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou [art] with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

“The valley of the shadow of death” is not a state, a condition, or an abiding place. Rather, the beloved of the Lord pass “through” death to get to the other side, where they experience eternal privileges, pleasures and joy. The shepherd used his “rod”, an oak club about two feet long, to defend the sheep against wild beasts. An enemy has to first get through the Shepherd.

Phraseology used to convey a perilously threatening environment (compare Job 10:21-22; 38:17; Psalms 44:19; 107:10; Jer. 2:6; Luke 1:79).

“Thy rod and thy staff”: The shepherd’s club and crook are viewed as comforting instruments of protection and direction, respectively.

The protection of the sheep is the Shepherd. Death may be all around us, as it is when the wolves come to attack the sheep, but as long as you stay near the Shepherd you are safe. There is an end to the valley above, because it says (through the valley). We must walk through a few valleys, before we can appreciate the mountain top. Mankind in general, fears death. The Christian is not without hope as the world is though. We have hope of the resurrection. Fear shows lack of faith. I have noticed in my walk through life that I grow more in the valley, than on the mountain top.

Jesus defeated death when He rose from the grave. We Christians should look at death of the body to the world differently. Truly death to this world is just the opening to a new chapter in your book of life.

1 Corinthians 15:53-54 " For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal [must] put on immortality." "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

We are comforted to know that the Lord will never leave us, even in the transition to our life eternal from this life. The rod and staff of the shepherd was two-fold. It was used to nudge the stray back into the fold, and it was also used as a weapon to keep the enemy away from the sheep. It is a comfort to know that the Lord is watching over us nudging us back into the fold. It is also very comforting to know that He fights the enemy for us.

Verses 5-6: The able Protector (verse 4), is also the abundant Provider.

Psalm 23:5 "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

The enemy pursues, but the Lord's people are safe in the shelter of the Shepherd's tent. Yahweh prepares the table while the enemy is just outside the tent's door. The Good Shepherd literally feeds His children in the "presence" of their "enemies".

"Thou anointedst my head": The biblical imagery of anointing is frequently associated with blessing (Psalms 45:7; 92:10; 104:15; 133:2; Eccl. 9:8; Amos 6:6; Luke 7:46).

The world and its people are the enemies of the believer. The Lord promised us no better, when He said they would hate us because they hated Him. Notice who prepares the table. It is the Lord. The enemy may surround us, but the Lord still prepares the table before us. The High Priest was anointed with oil in such abundance that it ran down his chin. This is the type of anointing spoken of here. You never run out of the anointing God provides, it is more than enough. Even the priests (symbolic of believers), were anointed with oil. This anointing is there, even though the enemy is there also.

Leviticus 8:30 "And Moses took of the anointing oil, and of the blood which [was] upon the altar, and sprinkled [it] upon Aaron, [and] upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon his sons' garments with him; and sanctified Aaron, [and] his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him."

Notice, what this anointing did. It set them aside for God's purpose (sanctified). Notice the cup is not just full, but actually overflows. When we are filled with God, this is what happens, we cannot contain it all. His love overflows. Has your cup been filled to overflowing?

Psalm 23:6 "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

“And I will dwell”: There is some question concerning the form in the Hebrew text (compare also Psalm 27:4). Should it be rendered “I shall return” or “I shall dwell”? Whichever way it is taken, by the grace of his Lord, David is expecting ongoing opportunities of intimate fellowship.

David looks beyond the pasture into the future and is heartened by the glorious prospect of dwelling “forever” with the Lord. The Hebrew expression forever (“the length of days”), describes a reality in the present that continues into the future. David would dwell in God’s house even as he walked along His path on earth.

Goodness and mercy are gifts from God. His mercy endures forever. We see from this, that not only do we receive them when we are saved, but they remain with us forever. Dwell means continually live. One of the greatest promises to all believers is found in the following Scriptures.

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." "In my Father's house are many mansions: if [it were] not [so], I would have told you. I Go to prepare a place for you." "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, [there] ye may be also."

Notice also, that this place for all believers is a place of abiding (for ever).

Psalm 23 Questions

1. The Lord is my _____; I shall not want.
2. Why could David relate to Jesus as Shepherd?
3. What separation shall Jesus make at judgement day?
4. Jesus said, I am the _____.
5. What is the job of a shepherd?
6. Who are Jesus' sheep?
7. What is this green pasture in the spiritual sense?
8. In Jeremiah 15:16, what did he eat?
9. What are we to do to grow in the Lord?
10. What is interesting about the leading to the water?

11. What did Jesus say about the water He gave them in John 4:14?
12. What shall flow out of the belly of those who believe on Jesus?
13. If, the Good Shepherd provides the food and water for all, what is our option in this?
14. By one Spirit are we baptized into one _____.
15. He restoreth my _____.
16. He leadeth me in the paths of _____.
17. Why can man not restore his own soul?
18. Jesus became our _____ on the cross.
19. He (Jesus) gave us in exchange His _____.
20. What does Jesus restoring my soul make me?
21. If any man be in Christ, he is a new _____.
22. If we walk in the light as He is in the Light, we have fellowship one with _____.
23. What cleansed the believer from all sin?
24. Yea, though I walk through the _____, I will fear no evil.
25. How do we know that there is an end to the valley he was in?
26. What does mankind in general fear?
27. What is the Christian's hope?
28. What does fear show a lack of?
29. Where do we grow the most, on the mountain or in the valley?
30. What is death to this world really?
31. What was the purpose of the shepherd's rod and staff?
32. Where was the table prepared for him?
33. How much anointing oil was put on the priest's head?
34. Who are the priests symbolic of?
35. Were they anointed too, or just the High Priest?

36. What does sanctified mean?

37. What 2 things shall follow the believer all the days of his life?

38. What does dwell mean?

39. Where is one of the greatest promises to believers about their eternal dwelling place found?